

CHAPTER 1

TAKE ME TO JESUS

ONE DAY I was reading a Book so filled with great ideas that I *knew* the truths I was reading were not limited to the covers of the book. "Great truths like these," I thought, "know no boundaries of Time or Space."

Even as I was pondering this thought my eyes lit upon a statement so short and simple that I might easily have passed it by. Yet the impact of those three words upon me was tremendous:

"COME, FOLLOW ME."

As I read them a great longing came upon me to rise and actually follow Jesus. How I yearned to leave the trivial activities around me, the mechanics and gadgets of this modern age, and hurry at once to Jesus' side and follow him along the winding paths of Galilee.

"But of course I could not do that literally," I thought to myself.

"Why not literally?"

Who had spoken? Out of the ether the voice seemed to have come. Or were the books on the shelf speaking to me? I reached for a book on astronomy; then one on geology. I opened first one; then the other. It was as if the writers themselves were speaking the words into my waiting ears.

"There is no limit to Space," said the astronomer. "It goes on and on, east and west, north and south, overhead and down under, farther than the telescope can see."

"There is no limit to Time," said the geologist. "There is plenty of it in the past—no need to be miserly with it as we long since learned in computing the beginning of the glacial era—no end as far back as the mind can reach. And there is plenty of it in the future."

Suddenly over the radio right here in my room, I heard a tenor singing in New York City. I remained still, but space ventured forth and came to me. The voice traveled so quickly that it arrived the moment after it started. Space had contracted. Something, also, had happened to Time. It had changed, too. Time had become as fluid as Space. Then suddenly I thought—as Space moves, Time moves. Time and Space have been inseparable partners, but Time has been the elusive one of the pair. Too long we have said, "How far away is it?" and we should have said, "How long does it take to get there?"

As Space vanishes—but is not destroyed—beneath the vibrant wheels of a train and the vibrant waves of a radio, Time also vanishes but is not destroyed. As Space has revealed its secrets far away, so Time, if properly understood and properly controlled, is ready to give up its secrets of past and future. We have found Space and put shackles upon it. Time, its partner, stands at our palace door. Behold, I shall arise and go forth and lead Time in. I shall put it to work in the interests of our present generation. As Space has given me journeys to distant parts and has brought beautiful messages from the ends of the earth, so shall Time now take me on journeys of joyful discoveries and bring messages from the distant past.

And then I said, "Take me to Jesus."

At once a strange vehicle of light and sound appeared before me. I stepped inside and began as wondrous a pilgrimage as mortal ever made.

For it was not Space that flitted past me as we rose in the air, but men and flowers and living things—and all, all were growing young, young; heavy voices receding into childish laughter and trees fading into seedlings striving for the light; all returning to their roots of love and joy and peace.

And when the light was very bright, and the joy was very full, I found myself standing by the side of a low, slanting hill. Down it was coming a young man with quiet, uplifted gaze, whose eyes were dark, but soft and friendly as hearth embers burning low. Such contentment fell upon me as I looked into his eyes that days might have passed and months rolled on before I ever noticed the rest of his face, were it not for the smile that seemed to bring the heavens down. Although he did not look at me I thrilled as I felt myself somehow included in that smile!

Come Follow Me

"Dear one, you have stepped outside of Time. No matter. Where you have stepped, there I have always been." Had he spoken? He had already passed on.

A herdsman came beside me. "Did you speak?" I asked.

He pointed to the figure that had passed. "He thought a thought," he said. "His thoughts are heard if you are hungry enough. He feeds us with his thoughts." He paused a moment, then added slowly, "I sometimes feel he does not consciously think them, but rather they are drawn out of him by another's need."

"And who are you?" I asked.

"I am a herdsman of Capernaum not long here from Keriothe with my family. That man once saved my niece from dying. He only took her hand—" he paused, bewildered. "She was already dead. He only took her hand—and she arose! I love that man. He saved the beloved daughter of my most beloved brother—and he only took her by the hand!"

He led me down the Capernaum way and invited me into his cottage.

"I see you are drawn to Jesus. You are a stranger here?" he said as we entered the doorway.

"My son, Judas," he added, "is working at the place of trade. When he comes home, he will tell you more. Meanwhile, rest here for a while."

Shortly the door opened, and Judas came in. He was tall and dark with a handsome, though cold, mouth. When he took my hand he enfolded it in long bony fingers that I knew would have hurt had he pressed me with the warmth that I pressed him.

The father said, "Here is another who would follow our Jesus, son."

"He is worth following," said Judas. "There is no limit to what that man can do. He saved my favorite cousin, and all that he did was to take her by the hand. Just wait until he seizes power with his two hands!" His white teeth flashed in his swarthy face.

Just then a woman came in accompanied by a maiden, slender and frail in body but with large and mystical eyes. I loved her the moment I saw her. The woman obviously was the mother of Judas and like him she was angular, cold, and, it seemed, severe.

"This is my wife," said the herdsman simply. "And the little niece I was speaking about. Her parents are away for a week and she is staying with us while they are gone."

"Uncle Jairus," said Judas with a show of pride, "is Ruler of the Synagogue, and is off for their annual meeting in Jerusalem."

"Do you live in these parts, or are you a temporary sojourner here?" asked the mother.

"You are not a native of Capernaum, that I see," said Judas. "Do you come from Cana?"

"No."

"From Bethesda, from Nazareth?"

These names seemed familiar, yet so strange and far away.

"No," I replied, "I come from very much farther away than that, much much farther."

"I am sorry that we do not have room for you here in the night," said the mother, "but you are welcome to stay for our evening meal. Ruth will help me get it ready and you need not wait long. Have you traveled far today? Are you tired?"

"I have traveled very far," I replied, "but I am not tired."

I was aware of something piercing me from behind, and turned about uneasily to find Judas staring at me. A slight tremor passed through my body. What if he plied me with further questions; how could I answer in a way they could understand? What if he suspected me of something that I was not? In my ignorance of their customs, how could I protect myself?

With a strange, oriental politeness foreign to my occidental training, they dropped their questioning as suddenly as they had begun. The conversation took another turn. They talked of simple things, of the weather, of the dust which they said was worse this year than last, of the caravans passing through the trade route north of the town in larger numbers than ever before.

"I can say this much for Roman occupation of the territory," said the father. "The Romans do make travel safer than it has ever been before. They help to produce conditions that could lead to prosperity."

"But," said Judas, "for every protection they bring, they make the conquered people pay double in taxes. Better a few bandits than so many publicans."

"What the bandits leave, the publicans take," said the mother dryly. Then setting a bowl of lentils on the table she added, "How I hate the very word—publican!"

"Yes," said the father, "I suppose they are the lowest dregs of this lowly land."

"I understand that they collect all that the traffic can bear," I remarked.

"What is that you say?" asked the father quickly. Then he smiled. "You must indeed come from a strange land. You use the quaintest expressions!"

Ruth brought pan and towel and we washed our hands.

"Come, please," said the mother, and we all reclined around the table. I found this a very comfortable position, although I did shrink from the way they put their fingers right into the food, even into the stew, taking out what they wanted. I saw now why they had brought the pan and towel, why washing the hands seemed so important before eating. I began to wonder how people could have lived in this age, so different in hygienics—and so totally devoid of sanitation.

As we ate, for the most part in silence—as though it were more a rite than a meal, I was haunted by the thought that the bodies reclining around that table were actually long lying in their graves! They were completely dematerialized by now, yes, possibly not even a skeleton left. Yet here they were partaking of food and evidently enjoying it. Besides, what exactly was this process of taking food? Did it not in reality consist of letting the life of God merely pass through like a flowing stream? Then deeper thoughts came tumbling in rapid succession. By what curious alchemy were the life-conveying vitamins, those mysterious elements of God, converted into flesh and blood, which in turn become a garment or habitation for a soul? And were not these souls here in my presence living somewhere, eternally somewhere? What should prevent them from donning garments of form at any time for purposes of identification, of recognition? I knew it could be so, and what were these friends doing now but simply that?

Then my mind shifted to another track. Some stars and their planets are a thousand light years away from the earth. Imagine a person in the twentieth century with a telescope through which he could see a detailed close-up on a distant planet a thousand light years away. Suppose, still further, that there was a mirror on that planet that could reflect life scenes on our earth planet and that he could focus the telescope on the mirror. As it would take a thousand years before a scene on earth was registered in the mirror, and another thousand for the reflection of it to come back to us, it would mean that through the aid of the telescope and the mirror we would be seeing events as they were happening on earth two thousand years ago! That would mean that in America in 2000 A.D. we could be seeing things happening in the days of Jesus. This raised another question: Who would then be real—the twentieth century observers, or the contemporaries of Jesus who were being observed? I smiled as I thought and looked at my hosts around the table. "Should I pinch you or you pinch me to see which one is real?" But I refrained from speaking or pinching for I had a strange conviction that I was of the substance of unreality and not they.

I was brought back suddenly from my wonderings by the exclamation of the mother.

"Zebedee! That is the solution!"

"The solution to what?" asked the father.

"The solution as to where this stranger can stay tonight. Salome, his wife, told me yesterday that since their cousin left for the vineyards of Peraea they have an extra room and we are free to send them any guests that come to us who are in want of a place to sleep."

"And who is Zebedee?" I asked very curiously, for his name had that familiar and yet far-off sound that was beginning to arouse in me a weird sense of recognition.

"He is the father of two sons, John and James, who make this city famous for its fishing. And they have cousins, Simon and Andrew, who are, with their father, Jonas, bringing in bigger hauls than anyone in these parts."

"Oh, Zebedee!" I exclaimed. "He is the man I wanted to meet."

"Where did you hear of him?" asked Ruth, strangely alert.

I stared at her, helpless to try to answer.

"Don't be so curious," laughed her uncle, relieving the strain. Then turning to me he said, "Ruth is half in love with his son, James. She finds things in that family that none of the rest of us do. Anyone interested in any of them interests her mightily."

"What she sees in that net-mender," said Judas, speaking with a lip curled in disdain, "is a puzzle to me. His way of doing things is wilder than the east wind."

"When you wish to go," Ruth offered, paying no heed to her cousin, "let me show you the way."

"They live right in our neighborhood—no need for your help," rejoined Judas.

"Judas," reproved the father, "do not discourage the hospitality we always accord strangers." Then to me he added, "When you are through eating, I shall go with you also."

CHAPTER 2

I LOOK INTO THE FACE OF ZEBEDEE

AND SO IT WAS that I found myself in the home of Zebedee, the luckiest thing that could have happened. "Yes," I thought, to myself, "I am surely in the hands of God. If I leave all to Him, trust all to Him, I know that everything I came for on this journey will be revealed."

(And here may I ask my readers to relax themselves completely to my story and remain sensitive to the Spirit, for only those who read this in tune with the Spirit will be able to derive full value from what is to come. I, for one, gain much every time I think back over the experiences that follow. Whether I was snatched up in body or only in Spirit I care not; but this I know, that what came through is of the Spirit, and the Spirit blesses all it touches.)

We found Zebedee sitting outside his house mending nets. He had a wide, shaggy beard over a strong chin, and above the beard, looking into mine, were two dark, meditative eyes.

"Here is a man from distant parts," said my guide. "Could you find a place to let him sleep for a few nights?"

"I am sure we can," replied Zebedee, bending upon me that wonderful gaze. "Come right along."

Ruth, who had accompanied us, went off down the road toward the lake where the fishermen could be seen unloading their catch.

Zebedee took me into the house. His wife was putting away the supper things, her back toward us. As we entered she turned with a quick movement and this time, very clear, proud eyes appraised me.

"Salome, here is a new friend," said Zebedee, and he went about the task of piling nets in one corner of the room to make a place for me to sit.

His wife greeted me with a dignity and grace that seemed unusual in a fisherman's hut. "Honored I am to meet one who looks as though he might have come from another world. I observe that you are not one of us. Are you from across the seas?"

"From across the seas of Time," I smiled back at her. She stared at me uncomprehendingly and then turned to the fireplace.

"I am used to riddles and conundrums," she said. "My husband talks in nothing else. If he employed his brains for practical things half as well as he does for allegories, we might be leaders in these parts instead of plain fisherfolk."

She lifted a heavy pot and then with a sigh added, "I hope John and James take the high places that are awaiting those who strive."

As she turned in profile I noticed her proud, keen features—receding chin and prominent high-bridged nose. Her sloping forehead was in direct contrast to the bulging forehead of her husband. I mention these details because they made a deep impression upon me as I sat there watching them, and I could not help comparing their features with those of the boys when they came in a few minutes later. James entered carrying a large basket of fish; John bore the nets.

James' eyes were keen and his features very much like his mother's—a receding forehead and chin sharpening the appearance of the nose and mouth. John had the bulging forehead and meditative eyes of the father. His chin was receding like his mother's.

They turned and saw me and smiled with a graciousness and hospitality that was both regal and simple in manner. James' bearing was erect and proud; John's was dreamy but very engaging. When I told John how eager I was to meet him, his cheeks showed a pair of deep fleeting dimples as his lips widened into a bright smile. There was a sweetness about this John, a dear quality that would make anyone love him. I watched as he turned and straightened out the nets and noticed how his hands worked with amazing dexterity and speed.

Come Follow Me

"I rather thought John would be impractical and inefficient," I said.

His mother turned and looked at me.

"I don't know what made you expect anything unless you have been talking with his father yonder. Well, John is certainly very impractical, but far from inefficient. The trouble is he doesn't like any work where he has to think."

"That surprises me!" I exclaimed, for I had especially considered John a thinker.

"Yes," she replied, "he is good at fishing, straightening out nets, doing anything where he can let his mind dream along about other things. If he can be a thousand miles away from his work, he is happy at it, not otherwise."

"On the other hand," added the father, "James, there, takes after his mother. They both think twice while anyone else in this house is thinking once."

"He thinks about the thing he is doing—not the thing he wants to be doing, like John," remarked his mother.

"And dad here," put in James with a quizzical smile, "just doesn't believe in thinking at all."

"Nope," responded the subject of our conversation, sitting on his nets in comfortable leisure.

"Where does it get you? We don't think ourselves into a living. We merely pull in the fish and they bring a living to us. And what makes the fish? Certainly not thinking! They are spawned into living. No, I care not for anything that isn't spawned out of a need to be met and a desire to meet it, nor for any recompense that isn't begotten by a desire to serve and gratitude for the service. Anything that is merely *thought* into being fails to interest me. It has only half a reason for existing. To me it doesn't exist, or if it does seem to exist," and he gave a snap of his fingers, "it doesn't exist long."

"A little more thinking and talking against the grabby Arabs that buy the fish from you and we would get a better living, all the same," said his good wife, putting the dishes away and wiping her hands.

"Everything talked or thought into a value that it does not really possess," said her philosopher-husband, "comes back upon you like a bad herring. If the world took things easier, trusted its values to be born into life, and not thought into life, all would be happier."

"Do you know Jesus, the carpenter's son?" I finally ventured. I was eager to discover whether any of this philosophy came from him.

"Oh, so you are a Jesus follower!" exclaimed the mother. "You are not the only one who has come a long way to hear him. It is strange how a young teacher who has spoken his message only a few months has drawn people from afar."

"Does he agree with you, Zebedee, on this birth process?" I asked.

"I think he would," replied Zebedee. "But I never asked him about it."

"He might," said John. "He is always talking of the necessity of being born again."

"How long have you known him?" I asked. "Ever since his boyhood," replied Zebedee.

"John and I played with his younger brothers," put in James. "He was older than we, and was working in his father's shop, or wandering alone in the hills much of the time while we were growing up."

"His mother Mary has told me some things that I think are precious," Salome confided.

"Did she ever tell of the wise men from the East?"

"Yes, but that is a long story. Don't get us started on it now. If you do, Zebedee will wear you out with the symbolism he draws from it."

"It won't wear him out, mother," said Zebedee, laying down the net he was mending and seating himself close beside me. "I am sure our guest will enjoy it."

John and James, their eyes twinkling, nodded to us all and slipped out.

CHAPTER 3

CONCERNING GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH

MARY HAS often spoken of the magi that came at the birth of Jesus, and of the gifts they brought," began Zebedee "Some of our neighbors doubt the story, saying that she made it up; otherwise why should not Joseph be rich? But they make the common mistake of all people who insist upon looking merely at the outside of the platter.

"The gifts the magi brought could be regarded as tokens—the little casket of gold did provide for Joseph and Mary on a trip to Egypt, but its significance didn't end there. I see it as indicative of the gifts of faith which Jesus will always find sufficient unto his needs. The gift of frankincense was also a token, indicating his would be a life interwoven with prayer. Joseph and Mary treasured this sign that Jesus would always keep in touch with his Heavenly Father. The myrrh gave assurance that he could heal human bodies when those in need came to him with a faith equal to the faith of the wise man who proffered the gift."

"And is this true?" I asked. "Does he have these three gifts?"

"Perfectly," said Zebedee. "With him they are vital. In fact, he is the only one I ever knew who has this gift of frankincense as a LIVING thing. Most of us have no contact with God whatever, and those few who do, have it only during the little period when praying, fasting or sitting in the synagogue listening to the reading of the Law and the Prophets, or when participating in some ritual of the temple. But Jesus has it always—when working in the carpenter shop, or when visiting with friends. Whether walking or working he walks and works with God; when sleeping, he sleeps in his Father's arms. He does not need to fast or engage in ritual—those are merely doors taking one into the Father's house. Why need to go through doors when you are already inside? Or, as he put it to John and James one day, 'Why need to fast when the bridegroom is present?' "

"Doesn't he pray? I mean, pray in words, as we have to do?"

Zebedee hesitated. "He was brought up in the synagogue and knows all the laws and the reasons behind the laws. And he says he fulfills them. But I sometimes wonder just how he prays. When someone comes to be healed, he does not pray; he merely touches the sick man and says, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Your faith has made you whole.' But my sons say he goes up on the mountain long before dawn and there talks with God as if He were his Father. I suppose he does his praying when the others are sleeping. If so, the rest of the day he is a *living* prayer. When a time of crisis comes, he doesn't need to pray in words as we do—he is already *living* in his Father's presence.

"I see," I replied slowly. "That is very interesting to me—very, very interesting." Then I added, "And in regard to myrrh, which I believe is a substance used for healing or preserving human bodies, you spoke of that as a gift of healing. Does he have that in an especial sense?"

"Yes, almost beyond the belief of man! But more significant to me than his power to heal bodies is his power to heal minds and souls. I've seen him actually cast out demons."

"And gold," I continued. "Somehow I can't think of Jesus as one who has a gift of drawing gold to himself. Was that really one of the gifts of the magi?"

Zebedee leaned hard over a knot in the net. Finally he said, "No one seems aware of this gift of Jesus except myself, and people might question me if I ever mentioned it. As a matter of fact, I have noticed for some time that since he came to the state of awareness, Jesus has never suffered want. This could be due to his good workmanship in the carpenter's shop, or to the good workmanship of his brothers, or it may be due to the careful planning and buying of his mother. They are a generous family, giving freely wherever there is want, and there is much want these days, with the Roman tax-gatherers sucking our very lifeblood, and the priests demanding much in tithes and gifts.

"Mary is infinitely more generous than my wife, who holds fast to every farthing we make at the fish market, and we make much some weeks. Yet we are in want many times a year. Indeed, we have been helped very often by Joseph and his family. But I have noticed that every time Mary gives something away, a new contract comes to the carpenter shop. I begin to think that her generosity has something to do with those contracts.

"But let me tell you something. I believe that Jesus will break away from his carpentry altogether now that Joseph is gone. He may leave it to his brothers and start out to preach. And, mark my words, as soon as he does, just see how he will be taken care of. Jesus has the very widow's cruse of oil, as far as gold is concerned—but he has no money stored up, no treasure chest hidden in a field, no pearl of great price. Gold to him is a fluid thing that will always flow in to meet his need, or anyone's need who has faith enough; and he will always let it flow out to satisfy the needs of those who come to him. Indeed, were he to require a coin to pay a tax or buy a meal and there were none in his pouch, I verily believe he could go forth and cast a line and draw in a fish and in the fish's mouth would be found the coin."

"Nonsense!" protested Salome, who had just entered the room. Then she added archly, "But I daresay he could sell the fish for a coin that would buy the thing he needed. Jesus of Nazareth does not need much for himself. This I will say, even though he is the dreamiest of all the dreamers, he uses most of the gold that comes to him to help others' needs—not his own."

"Did Jesus ever speak to any of you of a period of temptation he went through," I ventured, "where he spent forty days and forty nights being tempted of the devil?"

"He told our sons about it," replied the mother, "and they tell us very little that Jesus tells them in secret."

"They told us enough to satisfy our guest's interest," said Zebedee. "You see," he went on, "it is the custom of our young men who feel called to spiritual service to put themselves through a forty-day fast. Forty is symbolical of testing and discipline. Noah was forty days and nights riding out the storm before the new age began. Moses and his people wandered forty years in the wilderness before our mighty nation emerged. Forty is a symbol of preparation for great things, and Jesus is undoubtedly destined for great things. He is one of the few young men of spiritual vision who has undertaken such a test in my days. He is a true believer in the symbology of the Scriptures, Jesus is!"

"I sometimes get tired," Salome sighed, turning to me, "of Zebedee's everlasting tracing of symbolism in everything. And I think you are wrong, Zebedee, in not correcting our guest's impression that he was tempted forty days by the devil. You know it was not until he was weak and the period of fasting was almost over that the devil appeared. It was just the last three days that the three great temptations came to him."

"And did it ever occur to you, Salome," rejoined Zebedee, "that the temptations of Jesus were temptations to give up or use wrongfully, the three gifts of the Magi?"

"Oh, Zebedee," pouted his wife, as she put a kettle of water on the irons, "I never have time for thinking about such. You are always seeing new things no one else sees! You are almost as symbolical as Jesus!"

"There is destiny in every least event in life," said Zebedee, "if we can read it properly. And I have never known of a life in our time where destiny is so manifest as in that of Jesus. This may be because he has such a remarkable way, no matter what happens, of accepting every event in it as a part of his destiny. He is the only one in Galilee that does. Keep your eyes on him. Much will happen to him and through him."

"But about these temptations," I persisted; "in what ways are these related to the gifts of the magi?"

"They were temptations to use these powers for base and lowly ends," replied Zebedee, turning back to the mending of his nets as though he were in for a long discussion. "Take first the gift of gold, Jesus' gift of drawing to himself the necessities of life in the time of need, of veritably turning stones into bread. Satan suggested that he put to practical use this gift to make him the richest one in Israel. Jesus replied, 'Man does not live by bread alone.'

"And then the devil told him to use his healing power of love, the gift of myrrh, to win fame and glory for himself—yes, to demonstrate that he could be protected from hurt even if he dropped himself from great heights. And to this temptation Jesus replied, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' Last of all he was tempted to turn his gift of frankincense to selfish uses. Frankincense is another word for adoration. What you adore you draw to you. Satan said to him, 'Adore me, my power, my glory, all that I stand for, and you shall have all power and all glory!' To this replied Jesus promptly, 'Thou shalt adore God, and Him alone shalt thou adore.' "

"And so he kept his gifts?" I replied.

"Yes, and because they are flowing, loving gifts, he commands a reservoir of Good which shall never cease its flow. You can expect great and wonderful things to come from anyone who possesses and treasures these gifts. Indeed we all possess them if we really knew our powers, at least that is what Jesus says; and if we would trust his teachings fully, he would show us how to use them so that they would function in every area of our lives. He tells us we all can become heirs of God, just as he is."

Just then John came and invited me to take a walk with him down to the lake. James had gone out strolling with little Ruth. There was a lovely moon in the sky, and the lake opened beautifully before us.